



chapter nine

Catching the Waves: Balancing the Harmonics of Subtle Energy

Because energy is defined as the capacity to produce effects, love may be referred to as an energy; it is subtle, not because its effects or subjective impact are subtle, but because it is ineffable to science, or so it has seemed.

— JUDITH GREEN AND ROBERT SHELLENBERGER

JUST AS MUSICAL NOTES HAVE THEIR PRIMARY NOTE AND THEN A HOST of exquisitely subtle and beautiful overtones, the complex instrument of your human body has its physical structure and a host of subtler harmonic dimensions along a seemingly infinite spectrum of energies and frequencies. While novice musicians may not have developed the refined attention necessary to consciously hear, appreciate, and produce such exquisite tones, or may even lack the faith that they even exist, truly great musicians are able to not only hear such harmonic overtones, but to fine-tune their instrument to produce sublimely sweet music using such tones. The same is true for the subtle energies within and around us. We may not yet be able to sense them, but they are there and as we learn to tune into them, we are naturally better equipped to live a more beautiful, balanced, and creative life.

Insight into the world of invisible energies is offered by Buckminster Fuller, whose engineering genius inspired countless inventions and discoveries that have helped millions of people to live in greater balance upon the earth:

“The fact that 99 percent of humanity does not understand nature is the prime reason for humanity’s failure to exercise its option to attain universally sustainable physical success on this planet.... When I was born in 1895, reality was everything you could see, smell, touch, and hear. The world was thought to be absolutely self-evident. When I was three years old, the electron was discovered. That was the first invisible. It didn’t get in any of the newspapers; (Nobody thought that it would be important!) Today 99.99 percent of everything that affects our lives cannot be detected by human senses. We live in a world of invisibles.... I am confident that humanity’s survival depends on all our willingness to comprehend feelingly the way nature works.”

For many people, the notion of energy is an enigma. The greatest scientists of the world will readily admit that even energies that are taken for granted—electricity and gravity, for example—are still mysteries defying our full comprehension. The energies that we are talking about in this chapter are, at one level, related to subtle fields of life force that are bioelectromagnetic in nature and can be measured with a host of medical practices including X-rays, MRIs, CAT scans, electrostimulation, and acupuncture. There are also frequencies or qualities of energy that are more subtle and elusive in nature. They can be directly sensed, or even generated, with a high degree of precision by a sensitive person, and many of their effects can be measured. But the energies themselves are simply too subtle to measure with existing measurement technology, just as most ordinary electromagnetic energy was less than a century ago.

Every culture with a deep wisdom tradition has terms describing these subtle energies: life force, vital energy, or bioenergy; *prana* in Sanskrit; *chi*, *qi*, or *ki* in oriental medicine and martial arts; *lung* (pronounced ‘loong’) in Tibetan medicine and meditation; and *ruach* in Hebrew. In an excellent article recently published in *Bridges*, the Magazine of the International Society for the Study of Subtle Energies and Energy Medicine, Roger Jahnke, a doctor of oriental medicine, illuminates the nature of subtle energy from the perspective of the healing discipline of Qigong:

“One description of Qigong is as a discipline to ‘refine the body of pure energy.’ When ... the Qi develops and circulates ... it spills out into all of the channels and circuits. This is called the circulation of the light.... As the practitioner’s attention is fixed on the body of light, the

“At the heart of each of us whatever our imperfections there exists a silent pulse of perfect rhythm, a complex of wave forms and resonances, which is absolutely individual and unique, and yet which connects us to everything in the Universe.”

—George Leonard

"...the energy between us was communicated [through our] eyes, and made me begin to cry. We were both feeling the same thing, without any words being spoken. It was as though we recognized one another... as though we were one entity, one field. There was no obstruction or delineation between us. My heart felt like it had burst open... [my] whole body was breathing, in a sense. I perceiving through my heart, not just through the eyes. It was like the... etheric being was in resonance with my husband's etheric being. Somehow this alignment occurred, and we were not limited to the flesh..."

—Reported in Michael Murphy's *Future of the Body*

"If a living system is suffering from ill health, the remedy is to connect it with more of itself."

—Francisco Varela

dense body of substance becomes secondary. Rather than a physical body with a resonating energy field, the individual, from this perspective, is an energy field that has a small dense body of flesh at its center.

"Thousands of years ago, Chuang Tzu asked, 'Is it Chuang Tzu asleep dreaming he is a butterfly? Or is it the butterfly dreaming he is Chuang Tzu?' In the Qigong of transcendence it is asked, 'Is the practitioner of the deep Qigong state a person in a moment of transcendent energetic experience, or is his manifestation in a physical body actually a brief exploration into substance by an entity whose normal state is one of highly refined resonating light energy?'"

In recent decades, we have witnessed an increasing interest in the subtle energetic nature of human beings. This interest has been accelerating the evolution of medical science and fitness training to include progressively subtler and subtler dimensions of our human body. Gradually, we have come to recognize that within our physical structure are myriad vital biochemical, bioelectric, and subtle energy fields of influence that are essential to the state of dynamic balance that we call health. When the flow of energy at any of these levels is blocked, the quality of our health and vitality is compromised. Whenever the flow of energy at any or all of these levels is balanced, we move toward health.

The increasing awareness of subtle energies is due to a number of factors: the post-Einsteinian physics of the unified field has revealed that our world is composed of dynamic relationships of countless frequencies of energy. Advances in technology are revealing that our universe is indeed woven of myriad frequencies of energy, and that the health of living organisms is reflected in the flow of energy within them, and in the balanced exchange of energy between them and their environment.

The growing crisis in health care and the increasing density of electromagnetic fields in our environment are leading to advances in the number of studies related to life energy. Ultrasound, X-rays, MRIs, CAT scans, electrostimulation, acupuncture, and a host of modern and ancient approaches are increasingly being used in the diagnosis and treatment of disease and the promotion of health. Many of the hands-on treatments are proving to be highly effective, and free from the expense and side effects associated with pharmaceuticals or invasive technology.

As stress, complexity, and fragmentation in our modern lives continue to mount, more and more people are seeking knowledge and skills to restore their balance and to live with a greater sense of simplicity, connectedness, and wholeness. Increasing numbers of people are

taking an interest in traditional and nontraditional spiritual pursuits, and are actively practicing various forms of contemplation, meditation and prayer, yoga, or healing and martial arts such as tai chi, chi kung (or Qigong), and aikido, all of which expand the spectrum of awareness to the natural flow of subtle energies within and among us. The effects of many of these ancient practices have been well documented in Western, Eastern, and indigenous traditions for thousands of years, and are now being confirmed by medical and scientific studies, increasing our collective faith in such pursuits.

BALANCE EQUALS HEALTH

Many medical systems in cultures around the globe regard health as the expression of balance. Unlike Western medicine, which looks at “fighting” disease with antibiotics of all sorts, other traditions—Tibetan, Japanese, Chinese, Ayurvedic, naturopathic, homeopathic, and bioenergetic, to name but a few—use nonviolent models that seek to restore health by restoring harmony within the living system as a whole. These medical systems understand that all parts of a living organism are necessary and important components of its wholeness. If there is illness, it means that one of the parts or systems is out of balance with the whole. Healing, then, becomes a question of recognizing where there is too much of one thing or too little of something else, and applying appropriate treatments to reduce the excesses or build up the deficiencies.

Looking through the lenses of the acupuncture tradition, Professor J. R. Worsley, president of the College of Clinical Acupuncture in the United Kingdom, explains that health is determined by the balance within the subtle energy called life force:

“The body-mind-spirit of every man, woman and child desires health so that we may be at one with the energy of the cosmos, both within us and without. When there is disunity the human life force signals its distress. We see then many different symptoms: continual anger, migraine headaches, sexual problems, emotional instability, ulcers, arthritis pain. . . . These life-force signals tell us that our balance is disturbed, that the energy is blocked and must be released to flow smoothly through the human system. Our drug-oriented and suppressive attitudes toward illness often create additional imbalance because we have not yet learned to place the emphasis on health as unity which brings wholeness to the human condition.”

The law of the five elements in oriental medicine follows a basic cycle: begin with Fire, Earth, Metal, Water, Wood, and return to Fire.

“Heaven is my father
and earth my mother
and even such a small
creature as I finds an
intimate place in its
midst. That which
extends throughout
the universe, I regard
as my body and that
which directs the
universe, I regard as
my nature. All people
are my brothers and
sisters, and all things
are my companion.”

—Chang Tsai

“From health stems
harmony, balance,
and unity. From
disease we suffer
discord, chaos,
and disunity.”

—J.R. Worsley,
President, College
of Clinical
Acupuncture

“Energy medicine
attempts to
reconceptualize
patterns of
information flow in
the body in ways that
differ from those of
biochemistry and
molecular biology.”

—Brendan O'Regan

“Since Universe is Energy, part of the process of understanding, at least as I experience it, is to learn to “see” flows of energy and specificities of energy. Both are necessary. Because, you see, Universe is both Whole and Specific. Western science is beginning to understand this through explorations about particle and wave. Both particle/particularity/specificity of Universe and the wave/flow of Universe were aspects I was encouraged as a child to apprehend and understand. I was asked to “see” the dancing points of light and then to apprehend the shift from location to flow. Much of shamanic practice has to do with developing the ability to enter and use this shift.”

—Paula Underwood
Spencer

This cycle describes the flow of life force energy, or chi, in every being and in the universe. According to this system of subtle energy balance, chi energy is characterized by its dual aspects of yin and yang, which form an inseparable wholeness. As Professor Worsley poetically describes it, “yin, the passive force—the negative, the night, the moon—is never separated from the yang—the creative, the positive, the day, the sun. The two are like poles of a battery. Without both poles, the battery will not function.”

The five elements, like yin and yang, never stand alone. Each element governs and is governed by another. For example, according to this theory, Fire creates Earth and rules Metal, Earth creates Metal and rules Water, Metal creates Water and rules Wood. Water creates Wood and rules Fire, while Wood creates Fire and rules Earth. Each element is also understood to be related to a particular emotion, organ system in the body, and even season of the year and time of day. Learning to manage the energy of each of these interrelated elements is to participate in a dynamic dance of wholeness.

In practice, the cultivation of subtle energy awareness has to do with four areas of learning, each of which is related to balance:

1. Learning to relax and let go of unnecessary tension in the body or excessive turbulence and agitation in the mind.
2. Learning to balance the mind in order to access a state of intense calm and concentration without distraction (the panoramic mind-state described in Chapter Seven).
3. Practicing breathing exercises that link and balance the flow of mind/energy/body.
4. Learning to tap the wisdom and harness the power in rhythmic activity.

We have both done our share of traditional weight and aerobic training, and we’ve been amazed at the balanced power, strength, vitality, and suppleness achieved through the more subtle energy training. For nearly forty years now, Joel has practiced and studied various styles of tai chi, chi kung, and aikido. As he recalls:

“When I was in high school and college, I worked as a stock boy and then salesman for a lumber company. In my early days in that job it was not uncommon for me to stack more than a ton of lumber a day. As a result, I got really strong, but not in a particularly balanced or flexible way.

“Later, between my undergraduate and graduate study, I studied and practiced tai chi for nearly three hours a day for about six months. In those days I didn’t have a car and I rode my bike to get around town. When I started doing tai chi, I was amazed how much stronger and flexible I became, even though the movements were so very subtle.

“Then, in preparation for an intensive six-month training program we did for the U.S. Army Green Berets, I did a lot of well-engineered weight training, plus internal energy training with aikido, a Japanese-style martial art that works with bringing ‘the energies of heaven and earth into harmony within the human being.’ This produced yet another quality of balance that served me well during the arduous training we did for the troops.

“And finally, when we did a year of contemplative retreat, my only real exercise was 60 to 90 minutes a day of chi kung, the Chinese Taoist energy balancing system, and a variety of yoga postures. This was a good balance for the quiet sitting practice that lasted from 14 to 20 hours each day. During the entire year, my health and spirits were excellent, and coming out of retreat I felt physically stronger than before and had amazing suppleness and endurance as I set out on a number of long hikes.”

It seems that the more deeply we are able to cultivate inner balance, including energetic balance, the more dramatically it will be reflected in the “outer layers” of our lives. That’s why we devote the rest of this chapter to energy practices.

Two Palms Talking

Palm to palm, rub your hands vigorously together as you breathe deeply for about a minute. Then, continuing to be mindful of your breathing, gently hold your hands about two feet apart and slowly bring them toward each other. Imagine that you are generating or gathering a spongy, luminous field of energy between your hands, and let your hands gently push in on this ball, and then bounce gently outward again. As you do this, remember to smile to yourself so that you don’t try too hard, get too self-conscious, or take this experiment too seriously. After a short while, hold your palms facing each other and gently move your hands back and forth, noticing any subtle vibrations or sensations that may occur along your fingertips or palms. Maintain a sense of curiosity, and be open to discovery. Feel free to repeat stage one and to breathe and rub your hands together again if your sensitivity begins to fade. Experiment with the exercise at different times and see how your experience changes. Chances are you will have a direct experience of the subtle energies we are talking about.

“Convert the body into a luminous fluidity, surrendering it to the inspiration of the soul. This sort of dancer understands that the body, by force of the soul, can in fact be converted to a luminous fluid. The flesh becomes light and transparent, as shown through the x-ray—but with the difference that the human soul is lighter than these rays. When, in the divine power, it completely possesses the body, it converts that into a luminous moving cloud and thus can manifest itself in the whole of its divinity. This is the explanation of the miracle of St. Francis walking on the sea. His body no longer weighed like ours, so light had it become through the soul.”

—Isadora Duncan

Heaven Meets Earth

Another dimension of subtle energy balancing is the weaving together of above and below, of heaven and earth. Your ability to reach to the heavens is dependent on how deep your roots are in the earth. One especially powerful method of staying present in your power throughout the day is to experience yourself as a conduit for the energies of the earth and heaven. Because the electrical conductance at your feet and at your head have inverse properties, there's actually a basis in the bioelectrodynamics of your body to support this practice. Variations of this method have been used in countless cultures around the globe for thousands of years.

As you sit or stand quietly, imagine or sense a spiral of energy rising from the earth up through you and opening into the sky. Just be with this image or sense for a few moments, allowing it to emerge as naturally as possible into your awareness. Breathe in and draw the energy of the earth up and into you. Exhaling, feel this flow of energy rising up through your body and opening upward into the sky. Draw the energy of the earth up and into yourself, and then offer it up to the sky. As you begin to do this, you may find it helpful to use one of your hands to make an uplifting spiral, reaching up from the earth and spiraling up to the heavens. As you breathe and continue this image, imagine that this rising vortex of energy spirals through you with a deep and powerful cleansing action, dissolving any blockages to the free flow of the energy of your bodymind, and leaving you feeling clean and clear, vitalized and keenly aware, as though your energy and vibration have bumped up a notch.

If this kind of visualization exercise is difficult for you, just relax and give it your best shot. It's important to remember that, as with most of these exercises, you'll find that the more effortlessly you hold the image and allow it to happen, the more vividly you'll be able to actually experience its reality.

As you breathe, simply allow the flow of earth energy to continue to rise and flow in the background. Now, as you inhale, imagine drawing a vortex of energy or light down into you from the heavens above. Use all the special effects you can to make the visualization as vivid or as deeply felt as possible. Imagine that you fill yourself with the energy of the heavens, and that as you exhale, it spirals down and through you into the earth. Drawing in the heavens, bring that energy or light down through you into the earth like a wave of blessings. Let this shower of light and energy wash through you, cleaning and clearing your body and mind of any energies that get in the way of the flow. Feel your

"All beings are
embraced within one
All-encompassing
great energy.
So I understood
from the coolness
Of this morning's
passing breeze."
—Yamada Mumon

body and mind sparkling clean and clear in this balancing flow. Let the descending wave smooth, balance, and ground your energy, and deepen your sense of stability and rootedness in the earth.

Once you have established the ascending and descending flows of energy, simply rest in the flow of awareness of both of these two spirals flowing through you at the same time. Allow this vitalizing, harmonizing, healing flow of energy to totally dissolve any remaining tensions or concerns. As you rest easily in this counterbalancing stream, any energy that's blocked or frozen within you simply dissolves and melts into the flow. Let any sense of denseness or solidity in your mindbody dissolve and find its dynamic balance as a higher order of stability and strength that is pure flowing energy and light.

Though at first you may just get the idea of what this image suggests, with practice this will become a concrete and powerful experience for you. Be patient, don't expect fireworks or anything special. Just let your mind move like a magnet over a jumbled pile of iron filings and know that as your mind moves, all of the energies and particles within you will begin to align. Allow the energy that's already within you to flow more smoothly through you.

As with many of the methods you're learning, its actual form is very simple, but the power and insight that can be generated through practice over time can be quite profound. Throughout the day, if it feels right to you, when you're sitting at your desk, on the bus, or walking down the street, you might activate your awareness of these spirals of energy and light flooding through you. As you do, awaken to and rejoice in your groundedness and connectedness to the strength, steadiness, and nurturing nature of the earth, and to the open, light, majesty, and vast potentials of the heavens. Realize that though you may not be aware of them, you're never separate from these realities even for an instant. Practicing in this way will quietly, powerfully, and invisibly equip you with a way of moving through the world in balance and in a way that leaves a trail of light, good vibes, and blessings wherever you go.

"When you walk across the fields with your mind pure and holy, then from all the stones, and all growing things, and all animals, the sparks of their soul come out and cling to you, and then they are purified and become a holy fire in you."

—Hasidic saying

Circle Breath

In this exercise we'll introduce you to one more extremely useful strategy for balancing and focusing the energies of your mindbody. We use this technique often when we're walking or sitting quietly for a few moments. Initially we learned this from bioenergy healer Mietek Wirkus, and later learned variations from numerous teachers from other disciplines. As a child in Poland after the war, Mietek would accompany

"The healer must feel and be the heart chakra...Heart center vibrations relate to unconditional love, and to treating other beings with love, understanding and respect...It is not thinking the word 'love', it is not a visualization process, it is the real sensation of pure love which brings warmth, delicate vibrations in your heart area."

—Mietek Wirkus

"The conclusion is always the same: love is the most powerful and still the most unknown energy of the world."

—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

the local doctor in his visits to people who were sick or in pain. The doctor had no medications and few supplies, but he had found that his patients would often get better just by having Mietek be with them for a while or hold their hand.

Through prayer and meditation, the healing love of Christ, and years of training with elders who had developed their own healing gifts, Mietek learned much about the balancing and healing energy of love. In 1982, when bioenergy therapy was approved in Poland to supplement ordinary medical work, Mietek became one of the first professional bioenergy therapists to work in the Polish medical centers performing detailed diagnoses and treatments for hundreds of people each week. In 1985, Mietek and his wife, Margaret, a journalist who assists in his work, emigrated to the United States. They settled in Bethesda, Maryland, and have offered classes for more than two thousand physicians, nurses, and other helping professionals.

Mietek has also participated in numerous research projects. We first met him at a special conference on energy medicine and healing at the Menninger Foundation, where Mietek was the focus of considerable interest. At one point, we were conducting an informal study on Mietek's brainwaves during a healing session. While he was working, one of the observing scientists stepped forward to get a closer look. "My God," the skeptical scientist exclaimed, "you can actually feel the energy he is generating." Stepping back and then moving forward with his hands outstretched in front of him, he excitedly pointed it out to the rest of us, "See right here, about four feet away from him, you can begin to feel the energy. It's like a very gentle breeze or an electrostatic field. And it grows stronger, or denser, the closer you approach. I've never experienced anything like this in my life." Intrigued by their notoriously skeptical colleague's discovery, dozens of other observers performed this simple experiment themselves, and most were amazed that they could actually sense a subtle and calming field of energy radiating from Mietek and his patient. One method that Mietek uses to keep his own energy balanced while he is working with people is the circle breath we're about to teach you. Here's one version of how the method we learned from him works:

Begin by becoming aware of your body and the natural flow of your breathing. As you inhale, draw your attention up along the back of your body, from the base of your spine to the top of your head. Then, as you exhale, allow your awareness to circle from the crown of your head down along the front of your body all the way to the base of the spine. Inhaling, again draw your awareness up from the bottom of your

spine to the crown of your head; exhaling, allow your awareness to circle down along the front of your body to the base of the spine. The flow of the breath defines a circle rising up the back and then flowing down along the front of the body. The beginning and end point of the breath is at the bottom of your spine. At the peak of your inhalation, your attention is focused at the crown of your head for a moment. Practice until you establish an easy, effortless, circular flow of energy around this orbit. Once you know how to initiate this flow of balancing energy and awareness, you will be able to rest in this circulation of energy while you are engaged in other activities.

Like many other exercises that ask you to direct your attention and energy in unfamiliar ways, this may at first feel awkward. As with all learning, as you become more familiar with organizing your energy and awareness in this new way, it will begin to feel more and more natural, and unfold in more and more effortless and deeply sensed ways.

The Drop and the Ocean

Sitting quietly and comfortably now, allow the breath to freely come and flow, effortlessly releasing and dissolving thoughts and tensions into space. As you inhale, imagine a bubble of light filling you from within. As you exhale, imagine this bubble expanding and opening out into the space around you. With each in-breath, be filled by this luminous energy, and with each exhalation, imagine this sphere of light opening and expanding, moving freely through the space, the walls, the buildings, the earth around you. Let everything open. Let your small sense of self expand and open to your surroundings. Allow all of the feelings, sensations, and vibrations within your body to expand, open, and dissolve like a cloud melting into space. Use the breath to extend your sphere of energy awareness like the radiating circle of a pebble dropped into a still pool....

Ahhh.... Opening in all directions.... Filling the space above you.... Filling the space below you.... Expanding and opening out before you.... Behind you.... Opening and expanding as a sphere of energy life awareness all around you.... Opening and expanding with each breath....

Now as you inhale, allow this light energy to take on a pleasing color and a pleasant feeling quality—perhaps blue and peaceful, or red and warm, or any combination that feels right to you. As you inhale, allow this feeling and color to fill you deeply and as you exhale, allow this colorful, “feelingful” sphere to open and expand within and around

“Researchers of so-called energy medicine are a curious lot. We unearth ancient practices, dust them off, clean them with modern solvents, and study them under the lens of high technology. All the while, we seek to distill simple truths about health and illness.”

—David Eisenberg

“...When you want to enter a different aspect of Life, you wait for the point at which Particle becomes Wave. And just at that split second before the Particle is gone and the Wave takes over, you enter between, and you become Energy. At that point where the wave becomes Particle again, you enter between and you re-become who you were or you make a different choice. Which is also possible. I think it is that space in which healing occurs.”

—Paula Underwood
Spencer

“All things, material and spiritual, originate from one source and are related as if they were one family. The past, present, and future are all contained in the life force. The universe emerged and developed from one source, and we evolved through the optimal process of unification and harmonization.”

—Morihei Ueshiba
O'Sensei

you. Imagine flooding the space around you with radiant waves of warmth and well-being. Imagine generating an atmosphere of peace, balance, and harmony that pervades the world around you. Sitting quietly, simply allow this wellspring of inner energy to rise within you and to open and expand so that everyone around is bathed in this light.

Now, having established this expansive sense of well-being, imagine that as your sphere of energy awareness opens, there is an echo from the universe at large. Imagine that as your nucleus of energy expands outward, a vast ocean of peace, or warmth, or love converges and pours itself into you. Sense the incredible feeling of balance that emerges as you simultaneously experience this expansion and convergence—your tiny mind-drop opening outward, dissolving into a vast spacious ocean, and this ocean of positive energy vibration flowing and converging into your drop. Allow all of your limitations, pains, thoughts, and cares to be dissolved into this free-flowing convergence, resting in wholeness, connected and belonging to the world.

The Nine-Part Breath

The last technique in this chapter is an important one to add to your energy balancing tool kit. It's called the “nine-part breath” because it has the powerful effect of focusing your mind/brain in just nine breaths! Because of its effectiveness in optimizing the functioning of your central nervous system, it's often used as a preliminary practice for any activity that calls for clear thinking and focused concentration.

It's been interesting in our research to see how many places we've encountered this technique. We've found it being widely taught in medical centers around the world, and when we were working with NASA it was being studied to see if it might be helpful in preventing lapses into the hazardous states of inattention that lead to high-speed plane crashes.

Many schools of natural healing describe cycles of energy changes that accompany each hour of the day. In acupuncture they are associated with the activation of different meridians and the physical, emotional, and mental functions associated with them. According to the natural body clock discovered by the Chinese, each meridian has its own two-hour period during the day when it is at its peak energy. For example, 11 p.m. to 1 a.m. is the time during which the gall bladder has slightly more energy than any other meridian. A person with an imbalance in the Water element often finds that their energy wanes during late afternoon beginning at about three o'clock, reaching a low ebb at about five o'clock. This is due to the bladder's dominance from 3 p.m.

to 5 p.m., and the kidneys' dominance from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Similarly, each of us has a time of day when we feel at our best or worst, depending on our unique life energy.

In the ancient Indo-Tibetan Kalachakra system of medicine and astrology, every second, minute, and hour of each day corresponds to subtle shifts in energy within the body and in the heavens above. The practice of meditation within this system is based on understanding the balance and harmony of these energies. Within the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions too, each section of the day has its own set of holy prayers and practices, reflecting an awareness of the different energies that each daily cycle brings. For example, in the Benedictine monastic tradition, monks and nuns observe a series of hymns, prayers, chants, rituals, and invocations for each hour of the day. The hours are regarded as the seasons of the day and are meant to be traversed in a mythical way in order to attune oneself to the elusive sacred mystery that lies beyond time. Until the crazed pace of modern life set in, many wisdom traditions encouraged a way of life that was slow enough to nurture balance, harmony, and deep connectedness to these energies throughout the many activities of each day.

One simple way to re-establish this balance is to cultivate a mindful awareness of the natural cycles of your breathing throughout the day. Not only does the breath flow in and out, but day in and day out, your breathing shifts back and forth on roughly ninety-minute cycles, alternating in its strength of flow between your nostrils like the ebbing and flowing of an inner tide. This natural cycle of energy flow is called the “nasal rhythm” in modern medicine.

Though outwardly this rhythm is reflected by the alternation of a stronger breath flow through one nostril or the other, inwardly the flow of the breathing affects, and is related to, shifts in dominance between the two hemispheres of your brain. At the mental level this cycle of alternating activation of the left and right hemispheres of the brain shows up as alternating periods of mental focus and mental diffusion throughout the day.

Learning to read your energy and to shift your energy from one state to another is an important key to personal balance. One of the most simple and direct ways to do this is to pay attention to the changing flux and flow of the breath from one nostril to another. Before we introduce you to two simple variations on this method, let's first do a little experiment to see how your brain is working.

When you begin, it's helpful to check and see which nostril you're breathing most strongly from. This can be done by simply observing

“We consist of and are sustained by interweaving currents of matter, energy, and information that flow through us interconnecting us with our environment and other beings. Yet, we are accustomed to identifying ourselves only with that small arc of the flow—through that is lit, like the narrow beam of a flashlight, by our individual subjective awareness. But we don't have to so limit our self-perceptions... It is as plausible to align our identity with the larger pattern, interexistent with all beings, as to break off one segment of the process and build our borders there.”

—Joanna Macy

"What we call mystical experience occur when there is a sense of oneness or harmony between the energy or power of our bodies, minds, and spirits and the energy of other beings and the universe itself."

—John Mack, Harvard psychiatrist

"You and I and everything in the universe exist as a part of the endless flow of God's love. Realizing this, we recognize that all creation is bound together by the same benevolence. To harmonize with life is to come into accord with that part of God which flows through all things. To foster and protect all life is both our mission and our prayer."

—Morihei Ueshiba

the flow of the breathing, or by putting a small mirror, like a compact, under your nostrils for a couple of breaths. Then you can look to see which nostril has left the largest cloud on the mirror. This is the nostril that you're breathing most dominantly through at this moment. If you don't have a mirror handy, you can just lick the back of your index finger and hold it under your nose as you breathe. Now, as you breathe on your finger, whichever side you feel the most air flow from is the dominant nostril at this time. So what does this tell you?

At the times when you're breathing predominantly through the right nostril, the mental functions associated with your left hemisphere are activated, and activity of the right hemisphere is cooled or subdued. What this means is this is a good time to focus your attention on tasks that require sharp, clear thinking and attention to details, such as writing a technical report or balancing your checkbook.

On the other hand, or brain if you will, if the breath is flowing most strongly through your left nostril, then the mental functions of your left hemisphere will be cooled and the functions associated with the right hemisphere will be activated or enhanced. This will facilitate the focusing of your attention on qualities that are more related to patterns and process. Thus, left nostril breathing reflects easy access to mental functions associated with right brain functions, such as creative planning and design. Functions like imagination, intuition, and relaxation are naturally enhanced when you're breathing through your left nostril and activating your right hemisphere. Researchers have also observed that the state of left nostril/right brain dominance is more conducive to receiving new ideas, while right nostril/left brain dominance is an advantage for speaking and giving a presentation.

If you watch carefully, you'll also notice that there are periods throughout the day when the breathing is naturally balanced between both nostrils. These points of balance occur at those moments of the "changing of the guard," when the breath flow is at the point of shifting from right side dominance to left side dominance or vice versa. At these times, there's an evenly balanced flow of breath through both nostrils. This translates over to an evenly balanced flow of energy and information processes between the mental functions of left and right hemispheres of the brain. So, whenever the breath flow is even between left and right you'll be better able to stay focused, and to balance alertness with relaxation, thinking with observing, and analyzing with creative imagination. Once you learn the nine-part breath, you'll be able to tune your system with your breathing so that you can balance your energy/brain/mind whenever you like.

The first variation in this approach teaches you the basic mechanics of the process, which are really very simple. Once you gain some mastery over this technique, it may quickly become your favorite balancing tool. This method has been described by many of our clients as the closest thing they've found to "mental floss" for clearing the noisy mind! First, inhale through your right nostril and exhale through your left nostril. This can be done by using the index finger of your right hand to close the nostril that you're not breathing through. As you inhale, close the left nostril, and breathe in through the right nostril. Then shift your finger to close the right nostril and exhale effortlessly and easily through the left nostril. Repeat for three full breaths. Then inhale through your left nostril and exhale through your right nostril three times. Finally, resting your hands in your lap, inhale and exhale through both nostrils three times, breathing as evenly as you can. Check in with yourself and notice any subtle shifts that have occurred in how your physical and mental energy is flowing.

Though at first this method may feel awkward, once you learn the moves and get into the flow, it's really very simple. The most important point to keep in mind as you do this nine-part, alternate-nostril breathing is to breathe easily and naturally. Avoid trying to breathe too deeply or forcefully. What works best is to simply relax and merely guide the flow of the breath through the floodgates of your nostrils as you breathe at your own natural rhythm and depth. You may be thinking, "Sure, I can just see myself now, sitting at my desk doing this one. I can just imagine what people will think." Well, keep in mind that once you learn how this works and what it feels like, you can simply guide the breath flow through the power of your visualization and intention alone, without needing the aid of your fingers. This will allow you to do this practice anywhere without anyone having a clue what you're doing.

Many people find that this is a useful technique to have in their pocket, kind of like a polishing cloth to shine up their mind in a spare moment here or there. One of our colleagues does this to get balanced for the day while she's warming up her car in the morning. Others we know will use the nine-part breath to clear their mind like a reset switch between intense meetings with clients. As you get to know yourself and your own natural rhythm, you'll find many useful times to plug this one in.

Now that you have the basics, let's add a second variation. Continue to breathe in the same alternating rhythms and add a simple visualization. In the space in front of you, envision a shining sun or a radiant source of the purest light and energy that you can imagine. Imagine

"Mindfulness can unblock the flow of energy in the body... As the body becomes clear for the flow of energy and the impermanence and change of all sensations becomes more apparent, the focus of attention... moves to the region of the heart. Now mindfulness and concentration on the changing sensations, even the movement of the mind, are experienced as changing, as vibrations. Perception of the whole world, matter and mind, becomes reduced to various levels of vibration. The meditator continues applying his understanding and growing skill and applies his penetrating insight to directly experiencing the true nature of existence."

—U Ba Khin, former Secretary General of Burma

“The Sioux idea of living creatures is that trees, buffalo and man are temporary energy swirls, turbulent patters....You find that perception registered so many ways in archaic and primitive lore. I say that it is probably the most basic insight into the nature of things, and that our more common, recent Occidental view of the universe as consisting of fixed things is out of the main stream, a deviation from basic human perception.”
—Gary Snyder

the streams of light/energy filling you and flowing through you like a shower of light that washes you clean and clear from the inside out.

As you sit quietly in the presence of this source of light, tune in and remember that you are in essence a living, vital, field of energy. And that the quality of your life and health depends on how successfully you're able to receive, transform, and release energy. As you breathe naturally, imagine or sense yourself as a field of energy and light resting in and infused by a larger ocean of energy and light. Imagine that as you breathe you're able to light up your personal energy field and wash it clean and clear of any darkness or disease.

Holding this image in mind, begin the nine-breath sequence again. As you do the first set of three breaths, imagine that you can inhale this light through your right nostril, and that as you inhale it flows down through the right side of your body. As you exhale through the left nostril now, imagine that this pure, clear stream of light rises up through the left side of your body, totally flushing away or dissolving any tensions in your body or any agitation or disturbances in your mind. Once again, the stream of light and energy flows in through the right nostril filling you with the purifying, vitalizing light, and as you exhale, it streams up and out the left, washing your energy, body and mind, clean and clear. One more time now, in right ... pure clear light ... out left ... flowing clean and clear. Yes!

In the second set, inhale and draw the light in through your left nostril, down along the left side of the body and then let it wash up and out through the right side of your body. Vitalizing, purifying, energizing light in ... washing the body clean and clear and dissolving any trace of dullness or sluggishness in your mind ... good. Once again, breathe in through the left, mentally guiding the flow down through the body, then exhale up and out the right, breathing away any foggiess in your mind or any fatigue in your body. And a third time now, energizing and vitalizing, dissolving and releasing.

With the last three breaths, imagine two streams of pure clear light streaming into you from the sun or your special energy source, filling you through both of your nostrils. The two streams of light come down through the left and right sides of your body to meet and flow together. As you exhale, imagine or mentally guide these streams of flowing energy together into a single stream that spirals up through the center of your body, filling you with a deep, bright, clarifying light. In through left and right, down ... merging and flowing up together to your crown and out through the mid-point between your two eyebrows ... lighting

up your body and mind in a deep and quiet way. Allow each breath to bring your mind and body into balance and into flow. . . .

Pause for a moment now and scan through your circuits to check for any subtle shifts in your energy or awareness. Like any new set of physical or mental moves, this may seem complicated at first. The essence of the nine-part breath is simple: in left, out right three times; in right and out left three times; and then in and out through both three times. Once you get the sequence, you can experiment with adding the visualization. As always, remember to smile, relax, and allow the breath to flow naturally without any effort.

BE MINDFUL OF LOCAL FIELDS

Having taught classes in bioelectromagnetic fields and health, we would be remiss not to address some of the more mundane, but important, health balance issues related to energy. Remembering that choice follows awareness, we are moved to share the following energy health guidelines for your consideration:

As we mentioned in the last chapter, since your body is highly electromagnetically sensitive, it is wise to be mindful of how the fields generated by your devices may impact or imbalance the energy field, metabolism, and health for yourself, your family, neighbors, and coworkers. Standards in many other countries for electromagnetic fields of mobile phones, devices, routers, and transmitting antennae are much more protective of health considerations than in the United States, and device manufacturers are not generally enthusiastic about putting warnings on their products—even though some states and countries are now finally beginning to mandate this. This is a topic worthy of considerable research and we encourage you to be dubious about safety claims generated by those who profit from these industries.

In general, we encourage you to avoid carrying a cell phone that is powered up in your pocket next to your generative organs—especially if you hope to conceive a healthy child. Also avoid carrying your phone in a shirt pocket or bra next to your heart, or in your pants pocket, as it can interfere with healthy cell development. Whenever possible use your speaker or a headset rather than actually holding the phone next to your own head. Similarly, keep in mind that your “laptop” is actually not well suited for use sitting on your lap when it is receiving and transmitting information—especially if you’d like to keep a healthy sperm count! While electro-mindfulness practices may be inconvenient and require some discipline and creativity, there is wisdom in this advice!

“There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening, that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and will be lost.”

—Martha Graham

"This garden universe
 vibrates complete
 Some may hear a
 sound so sweet.
 Vibration reaching
 up to become light
 And then through
 gamma, out of sight.
 Between the eyes
 and ears there lie
 The sounds of color
 and the light of a sigh
 And to hear the
 sun, what a thing
 to believe
 But it's all around if
 we could but perceive.
 To know ultraviolet,
 infrared, and x-rays
 Beauty to find in
 so many ways."
 —Mike Pinder

With children in mind, please avoid having a small child hold a cell phone next to their head, and never talk on a cell phone that you're holding at the same time as you're holding an infant, since the penetration of the phone's electromagnetic field into the brain of a small child is many times deeper than it is for an adult's brain. Related cautions are called for in using many wireless baby monitors as they too can generate strong fields, and seldom carry warnings. If possible, locate your wireless router distant from where you sit or sleep, and far from your children's bedrooms. Also, be mindful of the locations of cell-phone antennae and "smart meters" mounted on buildings close to where you choose to live, work, or send your children to school or play. Unfortunately, the placement and calibration of such transmitters is often poorly regulated and can create imbalances that compromise both health and safety.

ENERGY PROTECTION

Often we meet people who are afraid of being thrown off balance by other people's energy. They fear that they will be drained by others, or that they will pick up on other people's negativity. Their fearful anxiety, and the tension and toxicity associated with it, is honestly more detrimental than any incoming effects from other people.

In order to protect themselves, some people stay home behind locked doors, carry guns, drive cars with bulletproof glass, or live in gated communities. Others wear surgical masks or rubber gloves when they go out in public. Some people wear talismans, chant prayers, give to charity, or sprinkle holy water in order to protect themselves. Although each of these strategies may well have their appropriate application, each may also subtly reinforce a fearful mindset in relationship to others that would tend to make one even more vulnerable and out of balance.

In his book *Aikido: the Arts of Self-Defense*, the great aikido master Tohei Sensei speaks of a different quality of protective energy that we can invite into our awareness, one that connects us with a greater level of balance:

"Remember that you live always under the protection of some mysterious force. This force is nature. Therefore, true self-defense does not stop with defending oneself against others, but strives to make oneself worthy of defense by nature herself. It respects the principles of nature. True practice must be in consonance with the will of nature....

When your mind and your acts become one with nature, then nature will protect you. Fear no enemy; fear only to be separated from the mind of nature. If you are on the right path, nature will protect you . . . and you need not fear anything. When an enemy wants to attack you while you are asleep, nature will awaken you. When an airplane has an accident, you will fortunately not be on that plane. Trust nature and do not worry. Leave both your mind and body to nature. Do not recognize friend or foe in your mind. In your heart let there be generosity as large as the sea that accepts both clean and unclean water. Let your mind be as merciful as nature that loves the smallest tree or blade of grass. Let your mind be strong with sincerity that can pierce iron or stone. Repay the forces of nature, work for the good of all and make yourself a person whom nature is pleased to let live. This is the true purpose of training.”

The most effective protection field is to fill your heart with love and to let that love illuminate your world. For example, let the radiance of your heart reach out and bless people as you drive to work. Pray that they safely reach their destinations and find the happiness and fulfillment that they are looking for.

Seek to discover the natural radiance of this inner light of love within you. When you find it, then let it shine as a blessing to the world. Because this dimension of your being may be too subtle for you to sense at first, experiment with living as though it is really here within you and around you. Looking out into your world, begin to notice and sense the radiance of everything—how sounds, smells, and lights radiate out through space, how the wind blows, yet is invisible. Notice how sounds travel through space and can be heard but not seen. Warming your hands by a candle or a stove, catch a glimpse of the radiance that shines through all things, especially living beings.

As you move through the world, imagine that you trace a pathway of energy through space and time. Imagine that anyone passing through the field of influence you have generated is drawn more toward balance in their own life. At stoplights, or at crossroads, on mountaintops, in churches, or meeting rooms along the way, pause, breathe, focus, and intentionally generate a large bright field of blessing energy that will refresh or inspire all those who pass through that space for a long, long time to come.

“From a hidden place, unite with your enemies from the inside, fill the inner void.

That makes them swell outwardly and fall out of rhythm; instead of progressing, step by step, they stop and start harshly, out of time with you. Bring yourself back into rhythm within. Find the moment that mates with theirs—like two lovers creating life from the dust. Do this work in secret, so they don’t know. This kind of love creates, it doesn’t emote.”

—Neil Douglas-Klotz
(translation from the Aramaic of Jesus’ words “Love your Enemies”)

“Be lamps unto yourselves; be your own confidence.

Hold to the truth within yourselves as your own truth.”

—The Buddha

“You are the light of the world.”

—Jesus